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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION
ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE
TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-fourth year

Letter dated 30 December 1998 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i.
of the Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to draw your attention to the statement by the Presidency of the European Union on Western Sahara issued on 29 December 1998 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under the item entitled "Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples", and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Hans Peter MANZ
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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ANNEX

Statement on Western Sahara issued on 29 December 1998
by the Presidency of the European Union

The European Union reiterates its full support for the United Nations Settlement Plan for Western Sahara proposed by the Secretary-General, which aims at the holding of a free, fair and impartial referendum on the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

While the European Union took note with satisfaction of the completion of the identification of more than 147,000 applicants to the referendum, it remains deeply concerned over the continuing differences on the issue of the three tribal groupings. This question, which has led to the halt of the identification work, has been a constant source of contention between the parties and subject to several compromise proposals.

In this context, the European Union warmly welcomes the arbitration presented to the parties by the Secretary-General in accordance with the United Nations Settlement Plan, in order to move the identification process forward.

The European Union also welcomes the unanimous decision of the Security Council, by its resolution 1215 (1998) of 17 December 1998, to extend the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 31 January 1999 in order to allow for further consultations, in the hope that they will lead to an agreement on the various protocols without undermining the integrity of the proposed package of the Secretary-General or calling into question its main elements.

The European Union expects and sincerely hopes for fruitful consultations and fully supports the assessment of the Secretary-General that the implementation of his proposal would clearly demonstrate the readiness of both parties to compromise and their willingness to accelerate the referendum process.

The European Union also strongly encourages the parties and interested States to effectively formalize the presence of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the Territory and to conclude the refugee repatriation protocol.

Likewise, the European Union stresses the need for the prompt signing of the still outstanding status-of-forces agreement on MINURSO.

The European Union reiterates its full support for the efforts of the Secretary-General towards a just, fair and lasting solution for Western Sahara. We call upon the parties to fully cooperate with the United Nations in order to make substantial and speedy progress in the implementation of the Settlement Plan in all its aspects.